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Comments by St. Tammany Parish Government in response to the Independent Panel Reviewing the Impact of Hurricane Katrina on Communications Networks.

1. Report indicates that the Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) was useful for subscribing agencies (page 21). In actuality and in the experience of St. Tammany Parish Government responders, the extent of damage to telecommunications infrastructure from Hurricane Katrina was such that calls – even those made within GETS protocols – could not reach relaying equipment far enough from the impacted area to make phone calls beyond limited locales.
2. Report indicates local governments failed to make adequate preparations for call forwarding and other telecommunications re-routing (page 23). In the experience of St. Tammany Parish Government responders, re-routing was of no use due to catastrophic damage to the telecommunications infrastructure that was beyond the scope of local public authorities to anticipate or mitigate.
3. Report indicates “satellite infrastructure was generally unaffected by the storm and could have provided a valuable back-up system” (page 24). Report further suggests that the failure of satellite telephones was due to “the user’s lack of understanding about how to use the phone” (ibid.). In the experience of St. Tammany Parish Government responders, satellite telephone service was insufficient and inconsistent, despite adequate training and correct operation of the devices.
4. Report indicates that the failure of local governments to obtain interoperability in advance of a catastrophic event was a primary impediment to emergency response at the local level (page 25). In St. Tammany Parish, local governments have worked diligently and effectively for many years to acquire and improve interoperable communications systems, and such efforts are ongoing. Larger impediments to emergency response stemmed from a failure at the state level to coordinate interoperability between state and local agencies.